

Garden Forum) came into being. The GLC were instructed to participate with this Forum before drawing up new proposals. The transition from a protest group to a body with whom the authorities could 'do business' was not easy. To some, including myself, the abandonment of the GLC plan was just the first round of a long struggle to wrest meaningful control away from the local authorities in favour of the neighbourhood.

The effectiveness of the CGCA was being eroded. As Doolittle so succinctly put it in *Pygmalion*, "middle class morality" was gradually enveloping and neutering the CGCA. Increasingly, the Forum became a talking-shop while the area was being surreptitiously undermined by developers' actions with which the local authorities acquiesced.

A resolution was passed at the CGCA's AGM in 1978 that no executive member could be also a representative on the Forum, and the two groups parted company. While this undoubtedly saved the CGCA (the Forum folded in the early '80's), it caused considerable sadness to Austen who felt that everyone should work together. He did recognise the reasons for the parting, and while he decided to remain the Forum's chairman he continued to actively support the CGCA and remained a lifelong member. I think he was immensely pleased that he had been involved from the beginning.

Following his retirement in 1984, Austen and Daphne moved to South London, near to St Martin's secondary school in Tulse Hill. Despite his retirement and an open heart operation he continued to be extremely active, though not in Covent Garden; for obvious reasons he had to limit his official connections to the area so as to give room to his successor at St Martin's-in-the-Fields.

Following Mrs Thatcher's decision to dismantle the GLC, Austen was once again 'encouraged' to get involved in the area's future. The Government determined that all the GLC's assets and land holdings should be sold. The GLC land holdings in Covent Garden, especially in the market area, were a prize plum in the GLC real estate portfolio "ready to be picked". The CGCA and others resolved that something should be done to retain some local control and established the Covent Garden Trust. The founder Trustees were Austen, John Toomey, David Bieda, Grace

Cook and myself. Eventually the London Residuary Body, a government quango set up to dismantle the GLC, agreed to grant a 125 year lease to the Trust concurrent with the sale of the GLC market properties. The powers of the Trust were very constrained but at least the potential of some local involvement had been procured, though rarely has it been exerted. As soon as the lease was signed Austen withdrew.

Austen was made for the Covent Garden battles. Without his wisdom and guidance the CGCA's effectiveness would have been much reduced. When things got difficult at meetings he would lay his head on the table and gently bang it up and down. It was a brilliant way to bring the meeting to order. He never used his experience to direct or in a negative manner but always to encourage others, to advise and give support.

"Everyone currently living or working in Covent Garden has much to thank Austen"

He took great pleasure that he was known locally not as the 'Vicar' but as Austen and with hindsight the combination of Austen and John Toomey was a formidable force that few could have withstood. Austen's contribution to the Covent Garden struggles made huge demands on his time to the cost of his family. The neighbourhood owes a huge debt of thanks to Daphne, and his children, Greg and Kate, who found that they had to share Austen with countless others demands. Those placed on him by the Covent Garden campaigns must at times have been the last straw!

Austen was a giant who taught us how to live on a gigantic scale. We all miss him.

A memorial service for Austen Williams was held on Wednesday 30th January 2002 at St Martin-in-the-Fields Church, Trafalgar Square.

Jim Monahan